

# The Sierra, El Paso & Pacific Railroad

## The Sierra Central Route

The Sierra, El Paso & Pacific Railroad, which is commonly referred to as the Sierra Central, is a Class 2 bridge line consisting of two divisions. The east-west Texas Division connects El Paso, TX with Seagraves, TX and provides a very direct route for interchange between the Cotton Belt, Katy, Missouri Pacific and Southern Pacific railroads at El Paso and the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy railroad at Seagraves.

The New Mexico Division is a north-south line that links El Paso with Taos, NM to provide interchange service with the Denver & Rio Grande and Santa Fe railroads. Originally the railroad had dreams of expanding to the West Coast, but management could not overcome the financial strength of the Santa Fe and Southern Pacific as those two railroads fought for dominance in the Southwest in the late 1800's. The time period for the Sierra Central is 1957 when steam still existed on many smaller railroads as the bigger companies moved to complete dieselization. The layout models the New Mexico Division.

Note: actually, both divisions are highly plausible. The New Mexico division is a replication of an existing ATSF line that exists today.

## Design

The Sierra Central is designed as a point-to-point operation with Midland (Taos area) being the northern terminus and El Paso, which is a hidden yard, being the southern end. In between are the towns of Sierra Junction, Cajon, Carriso and Seminole as the track traverses northward. Seminole has a small holding track just outside of town that is referred to as North Yard. The G-shaped layout exists in a finished 12' x 27½' basement room.

The lowest point on the railroad is Sierra Jct. At 42' above the floor, Midland is the highest point at 52'. Minimum radius is 27' yard and siding switches are #5 or #6's. The Midland Industrial District and Carriso are built with #4 switches. The ruling grade is a 1-3/4% grade on the curve between Cajon and Carriso.

An interesting part of the operation is the Midland Yard and Industrial District, which is worked by two operators: the Yardmaster and Industrial District engineer. Since no run around exists in the industrial trackage, the two must work as a team to switch the industries and make up trains south-bound from Midland.

One of the attached photos is a picture of the track plan for the Sierra Central.

## Operation

Approximately once per month, a crew of six people operates on the Sierra Central. During a typical 2-1/2 hour session, 2 passenger trains, two mixed freights with a drover caboose or single chair car, and 9 freight trains are run. Of the thirteen trains, only the 2 passengers, 2 fast freights

and one mixed train arrive/depart El Paso. A transfer freight shuttles from Sierra Jct. to El Paso to off-load the yard at Sierra Jct. The remaining trains operate between Midland and Sierra Jct.

A crew consists of two Yardmasters, a Midland Industrial District engineer and three road engineers. Form W's (general description of the train's purpose and work performed) and Form 19's (specific instructions such as meets, special placement of specific cars in a train, etc.) are used to guide each road engineer. No dispatcher is required since the Form 19 provides all of the information needed to control train movement.

During a typical operation session, approximately 50 to 60 cars out of the 85 freight cars on the layout will be spotted at specific industry sidings. Motive power is a mix of steam and diesel. Even the two passenger trains will have set outs and pick-ups. Sometimes the grade between Cajon and Carriso requires helper service. In such cases, a steam engine is held in reserve at Sierra Junction for such events.

A Railcommand DCC system was installed in 1997. This system makes helper service, train meets and team switching at Midland very easy to perform. It also increased the amount of traffic and number of operators.

## Scenery

All scenery is based on actual locations in New Mexico. Personal photos and magazine pictures were used to ensure accuracy. Basic scenery is actual New Mexico dirt spread over a layer of Structo-Lite that covers a blue foam foundation. Basic benchwork is what I call irderut requires the same amount of lumber. Roadbed is a strip of Homasote cut with a 40-degree bevel on a table saw. The Homasote is glued and screwed to a 1/2base. Risers made from 1 the trackwork. Most of the rock carvings were done by hand in the Structo-Lite and painted with acrylics. Below Carriso is a mountainside made of plaster rock castings attached to screen and painted with acrylic washes.

The small rock debris is a combination of stained Woodland Scenic rocks, actual New Mexico rocks and beach sand. The dark green shrubs and lighter grasses were made from Woodland Scenic products. North of Albuquerque, NM, the dark green shrub thrives in abundance – even during the hottest part of the summer where temperatures can be in the 90's for weeks at a time.

Many of the structures are scratch-built while some are kit-bashed. Frank Lerner, Steve Morris and Marty Vaughn have contributed the best looking buildings. The remaining structures, such as Vaughn Coal and Robinson Livestock, were designed and scratch-built by the author. The two wooden trestles and coal trestle were scratch-built by me.

## Rolling Stock and Motive Power

Since it is 1957, a mix of first and second-generation diesels and steam engines can be seen on a given day. Being a cost conscience company, the Sierra Central frequently leases motive power from railroads that it serves. Thus, Cotton Belt, Frisco, Katy, Rock Island and Southern Pacific engines frequent the line. The backbone of the Sierra Central's motive power is Alco-built Mikes and, more recently, Alco road switchers. While all of the steam engines are brass manufacturer products purchased before 1990, the diesels are all recent vintage plastic models (Atlas, Proto 2000

and Stewart) with some of them being repainted in a Sierra Central paint scheme.

Freight rolling stock is almost exclusively 40' in length or shorter. There are a few exceptions. About half of the freight cars are kit-bashed and a few are scratch-built. A number of home road cars also exist. Passenger cars are a mix of Athearn plastic heavyweights, AHM and Walthers kit-bashes and a Ken Kidder brass kit. The cabooses on the Sierra Central are for the most part, Hallmark brass Katy cabooses of different vintage, each painted in the Sierra Central's paint scheme. Katy and SP cabooses also appear during operation.

## **Crew**

Very few medium and large layouts succeed without outside help. My layout is no different. Dick Argo, Jim Kehn, John Kimball, Doc Sage, Howard Smith and Marty Vaughn all contributed time and effort in the design and construction of the scenery. Additionally, Dick, Jim, Marty and Bill Mapes have offered a continuous stream of recommendations regarding improvements to the operation, including the addition of a hidden yard after the scenery had been completed! But, that is another story.

## **Epilogue**

Right after the completion of this article, the Sierra Central had to be torn down due to a job change and associated relocation. Many thanks to everyone who visited and operated on the Sierra Central.